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ABSTRACT

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STUDENT VOICE: FACTORS THAT CAUSE TEACHER/STUDENT CONFRONTATIONS IN A PLURALISTIC CLASSROOM

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This research was a year-long project for my doctoral program. I thank, my doctoral chair, Dr. Geneva Gay, for invaluable support, advise and assistance in the evolution and preparation of this document. This paper was presented at the Fourth Annual NAME Conference in February, 1994.

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INTRODUCTION

In pluralistic classrooms, what happens when what's happening is relevant to students? How is the disciplinary' action taken against students of color related to disciplinary policies that seemingly operate in isolation from the sociological, cultural, and psychological realities embedded in the school climate and inherent within the individual student and teacher characteristics? How are the dysconscious differences in the cultural and perceptual interpretations of the "conflict act," further complicated by the systemic imbalance layered by the power, role, status and voice of the participants?

This research uses a transformative screen of STUDENT VOICE to examine student/teacher interactions resulting in classroom confrontations. Disciplinary action is analyzed from a student perspective in terms of identification, description, causality and rationale.

The focus of this paper is twofold, (1) to affirm, based on current research and scholarship, that educational programs that are truly multicultural will ameliorate or possibly eliminate the issue of discipline, and (2) to redescribe, deconstruct and reconstruct the basic assumptions regarding disciplinary issues.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature provided a conceptual framework which guided and justified the focus of this study. The contextual integration of facts, claims and truths were analysized across disciplines rather than reviewed in isolation. It is categorized for patterns of information within three distinct perspectives: content, context and process as shown in Figure 1, Conceptual Framework.

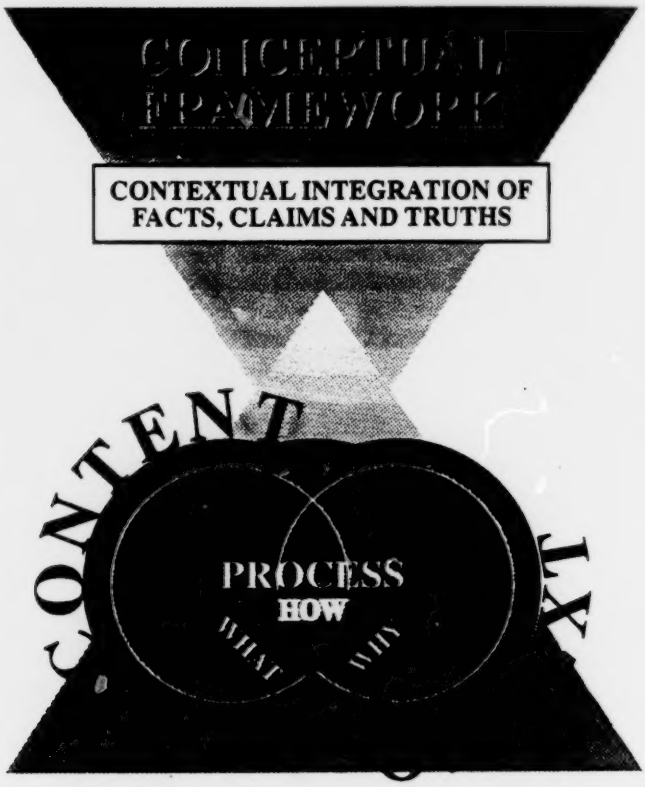

FIGURE I: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Content: Literature Describing the Results of Disciplinary Action

This literature describes the pejorative outcomes and inequitable results of disciplinary actions which have been identified by researchers as influences contributing to the high incidents of behavioral problems in

schools. Seven categories emerge: (1) discipline, rated the number one problem facing schools today, (2) high levels of disciplinary action toward groups of color, (3) disciplinary action as a major factor influencing high drop-out rates, (4) low socioeconomic status and its attendant problems including poverty, personal/family problems and poor academic performance, (5) student alienation reflected in absenteeism, indifferent, disruptive, and delinquent behavior, (6) violation of student rights due to issues of discrimination, authority, power, and social control, and (7) lack of teacher competency/preparation. This literature reports the following:

Discipline: Number One Problem Facing Schools Today

Two recent studies similarly classify discipline as the number one problem facing schools. Garza-Lubeck's (1992) research indicates that teachers identify discipline as the number one problem they face daily. Also, 15% of the respondents in the 25th Annual Gallup Phi Delta Kappa Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools rank the "lack of discipline" as the third largest problem schools must handle. "Lack of proper financial support," 21%, was number one and "use of drugs," 16%, number two. However, if all the categories in the Kappa Poll closely related to discipline, including: drug use, 16%; fighting/violence/gangs, 13%; moral standards, 3%; pupil's lack of interest/truancy, 4% are combined, the total percentage of concerns addressing unacceptable student behavior requiring disciplinary action by schools is 51% (Elam, Rose & Gallup, 1993). This allows a conclusion that discipline as the number one problem, is also reflected in this poll.

High Levels of Disciplinary Action Toward Students of Color

African-American and Latino students experience disproportionately high levels of disciplinary action, suspensions and expulsions (Williams, 1992; Fine, 1991; Data Profile, 1992). In Seattle Public Schools, African-Americans comprise 22.3 % of the student population on the secondary level and account for 24.0% of short-term suspensions, 13.3% of long-term suspensions, and 4.7% of expulsions for a total of 42% of the documented disciplinary actions that remove the student from the classroom. Latinos constitute 6.4% of the secondary student population, yet account for 15.6% of the short-term suspensions, 8.7% of long-term suspensions, and 3.3% of expulsions for a total 27.6%. Hence, Seattle Public Schools follow the national trend toward high levels of disciplinary action taken against students of color.

High Drop-out Rates

Discipline problems in school are one of the major factors influencing high school drop-out. Researchers conclude that disruptive problems often lead to suspensions and expulsions which culminate in high drop-out rates (Leriche, 1992; Phelan, 1987; Velez, 1989; Fine, 1986). Velez (1989) identifies disciplinary problems as the number one factor that affects the drop-out process for Latino students. Comparisons of drop-outs by race, sex, geographic region and high school urbanicity reveal that drop-outs are more likely to be Latino and Black (McCaul E, J. et al, 1992; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986).

Although other factors such as socio-economic status, low academic achievement, lack of participation in extra-curricular activities, accelerated role taking (such as early marriage and/or motherhood or full time employment) and socio-psychological issues contribute to the drop-out phenomenon, discipline problems play a major role. Behavioral

confrontations produce uncomfortable situations causing students to leave or create disruptive encounters whereby they are administratively removed.

Low Socio-Economic Status

Some researchers identify societal conditions in students' daily life as a major factor directly impacting both academic performance and behavior. Phelan (1987) identifies low-socioeconomic status and problems associated with poverty as the dominate factors causing poor academic performance, resulting in hostile behavior and indifferent attitudes toward school. He concludes that this disruptive and often unambitious behavior is a sign of deeper personal and family related problems, rather than totally isolated school-related behavioral issues. He adds that poor academic performance not only causes delinquent behavior but precipitates student drop-out. Other studies also reveal the negative attitudes teachers have toward low income students results in poor academic achievement, low self-esteem and conflict interactions (Rist, 1970; Oakes, 1985; Hamilton, 1986).

Two conditions signaling that the living conditions for African American and Latino students in Seattle Public Schools might be considered substandard in terms of the relative family income are the number of students living in single-parent homes and the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. The Seattle Public School's Data Profile (1992) confirms that 70.5% African American and 48% Latino students on the secondary level come from single-parent homes, both of these being higher that the district's average of 44%. The percent of African American, 55.4% and Latino, 42.3% receiving free or reduced price lunch in all regular and alternative schools indicate high numbers come from low income families. If conditions of poverty directly effect student behavior in school as Phelan

(1987) suggests, then these conditions exist for the majority of African American and Latino students in Seattle.

Results and Causes of Student Alienation

Students who feel alienated from the educational goals of the school may engage in confrontational practices. This behavior, passive or aggressive, is reflected by low grades, academically lagging behind their age group, lack of participation in extra-curricular activities, irregular attendance patterns, and disorderly behavior such as fighting and talking back to teachers.

Whereas the students of color may be exhibiting destructive and disruptive behaviors, this alienation is exacerbated by involuntary and systematic placement in compensatory remedial tracks. Oakes (1986) found that teachers in low-track classrooms emphasize matters of discipline and behavior such as "following directions," "punctuality," and "respecting teacher position." They are more punitive than teachers in higher tracks who are less concerned with disciplinary student behavior. This concurs with Velez (1989) findings that students enrolled in academic, college preparatory curriculum are less likely to experience disciplinary problems than students placed in other tracks. Yet, Black and Latino students are overrepresented in remedial, compensatory programs, low ability tracks, as well as being overrepresented in the number of students who fail or repeat grades (Oakes, 1986). Conversely, these students are underrepresented in high ability tracks and programs for the gifted and talented (Baldwin, 1987; Lezotte, 1993). Ogbu and Matute-Bianchi (1988) in their field studies with African American and Latino students state that persistent and disproportionate school failure leads to a feeling of helplessness which begins with anxiety, builds to frustration, and culminates in acts of aggression. This aggression can be self-directed,

such as excessive cutting, or it can be directed toward others, including talking back to teachers, refusing to follow rules or fighting. Experiences of repeated academic failure correlate with high absenteeism. Excessive absences are treated as disciplinary problems. In some schools, students can be expelled for a set number of absences (Fine, 1986).

Unfortunately, the reciprocal relationship between school alienation and discipline problems is reflected by poor academic performance, hostile, indifferent, disruptive behavior, and an accelerated drop-out process.

Violation of Student Rights

Parelius and Parelius (1968) and Chandler (1992) recognize that student/teacher relationships are a form of institutionalized dominance and subordination. The power or formidable control by educators over students sometimes occurs at the expense of student's rights. Chandler (1992) cites various legal cases in which students were subjected to unreasonable discriminatory actions using unfair procedures violating due process.

When students in Seattle Public schools feel their rights have been violated, they may choose to appeal the disciplinary action. They are guaranteed a hearing by an appeal board. The Student Disciplinary Action Transaction Edit Report (1993) reports that 61.5% of suspensions and expulsions are modified, mediated or reversed when students' appeal is heard by impartial district committees. This would seem to indicate an original mis- or overuse of power. Disciplinary appeal hearings have increased 59% on the secondary level from the 90-91 to the 91-92 school year.

Often, when students perceive injustice, feelings of powerlessness fester forcing them to react with aggression (Leriche, 1992). Williams (1992) reports that this reaction is a result of blatant disregard for student rights and

the lack of a clear classification of offences by severity and range of permissible disciplinary action prescribed. He repudiates the broad discretion given to administrators to determine what disciplinary action should be imposed, especially if they have the power to suspend and expel students. He advocates a clear classification of offences by severity and a range of permissible disciplinary actions for each category be delineated.

Lack of Teacher Preparation and Competency

Teacher expertise and management style affect student behavior. Often school rules require socially abnormal behavior, such as no talking and staying seated for long periods of time. Teachers who demonstrate a high level of organization and expect a higher level of student performance, experience minimal disciplinary problems (Garza-Lubeck, 1992; Leriche, 1992). These teachers usually have fewer rules and are consistent in enforcing them. Garza-Lubeck (1992) concludes that these teachers and students experience mutual respect. However, teachers who resort to coercion, force and manipulation cause negative relationships resulting in punitive disciplinary actions. Researchers agree on the need to train teachers in a system of discipline based on interaction, mediation and negotiation rather than one imposed through force (Williams, 1992; Leriche, 1992).

Context: Literature Describing the School Climate and Student Cultural Orientations

Research and scholarship in this category shifts to a context rather than content by explaining "why" disciplinary action taken by the school toward students of color might be in opposition to their ethnic and cultural mores. Whereas the literature in the first category (content) identifies "what"

the problem is, literature in this category explains "why" the existing educational conditions may be unamendable if not understood contextually. It describes the phenomenon from varying perspectives, establishing theoretical, philosophical and dialectic explanations by interpreting student/teacher disciplinary issues. It argues that disciplinary problems may be rooted in cultural discontinuities, which must be identified and understood as critical diagnostic symptoms of classroom confli t. Five factors include: (1) student cultural shifts, (2) degrees and stages of ethnic identity, (3) styles of communication, (4) opposing core values, and (5) class and social stratification. Researchers in this category evince the following:

Student Cultural Shifts

Boykin (1986) theorizes that disciplinary problems children of color experience in school, as well as low achievement, continue, because arbitrary boundaries dividing psychology from issues of social structure and culture do not allow scholars to adequately analyze the cause. He concludes that schooling in America represents a form of social domination, or hegemony which can only be understood by contextual and interactional explanations. For example, African American students, according to Boykin (1986), face a triple quandary, having to constantly negotiate their behavior by integrating three divergent psychological realities at once: mainstream, minority and Black. He postulates that students may deliberately resist behaving within the expected mainstream mode when a cultural clash of motives, beliefs and values co-exist. Boykin (1986) concludes Latinos experience similar cultural shifts.

Gay (1981) supports this hypothesis, stating that students from culturally different backgrounds, finding themselves in conflict situations may choose to meet their individual needs, thus challenging school norms and

values. Therefore, if students choose to satisfy cultural and ethnic needs over institutionally conflicting demands, this may not necessarily be maladaptive behavior, but rather a culturally adaptive reaction which preserves their ethnic integrity. However, questioning the school's social system, generally based on an Eurocentric ethos, by not embracing mainstream beliefs, values and patterns of behavior, may create resignation and resistance, or it may produce a situation in which behavioral control and discipline is elevated to a conflict stage (Gay, 1981; Boykin, 1986; Bennett, 1990).

Degree and Stage of Ethnic Identity

Scholars of models of psychological nigrescence identify three basic states of ethnic identity. Cross (1971, 1991) organizes Black identity around three stereotypic and process images, concluding that they are actually two different ways of depicting the same phenomenon. He labels these stages Pre-encounter, Immersion-Emersion and Internalization. Each stage as described by Cross (1991) is: Pre-encounter, the stereotype is the Negro, and the process is a person who has not discovered Blackness; Immersion-Emersion's stereotype is the angry Black militant, and the process is one who is discovering Blackness; and Internalization, the stereotype is a Black who has accepted and internalized Blackness, and the process is evident in an individual who has been Black for sometime. In the Pre-Encounter the "old" identity is operative, and in the Immersion-Emersion stage there is a transition from the old to a new identity. In the final stage, Internalization, the new identity is incorporated.

Gay (1985, 1987), labels the stages of identity Pre-Encounter, Encounter and Post-Encounter. Basically her paradigm is congruent with Cross. She describes the Pre-encounter as a stage in which the individual is using White

expectations as a measure of what is desirable and acts in a way that degrades Blackness. The Encounter stage is transformational. In this stage individuals experience an "encounter" or an event(s) that obliterates their "ethnic innocence" causing a revision of existing beliefs. The result, often is a struggle destroying vestiges of the old self while developing the complexion of a new ethnocentric identity. The relationship of this stage to issues of discipline in the schools is manifested by the child's feelings toward Whites. Students, in the Encounter stage, often withdraw from everything that represents an Eurocentric White world and often "act-out" feelings of anger, hostility and rebellion. The Encounter stage, according to Gay (1978), usually emerges during the middle school years. The presence of ethnic developmental changes coupled with the drastic social, physical and psychological changes occurring during adolescence adds a crucial dimension to the conflicting emotions in students which may cause behavioral conflict in the classroom. In the third stage, Post-Encounter, individuals have internalized their Blackness and are more accepting of self and others.

If the ethnic identity process adolescents experience, especially in the Encounter stage, is not understood, the student's rage may be personalized by authority figures and interpreted as unjustified. Gay (1978, 1985), therefore, proposes that conflict resolution whereby students are able to identify and understand the source of their hostility be part of the instructional program.

Styles of Communication

Kochman's (1981) study on the the fundamental differences in meanings and values inherent in Black and White communication patterns is crucial in interpreting African American student's verbal interactions with authority figures. He states that Blacks distinguish between argument used to

explain a difference of opinion and argument used to express hostility and anger. Both are animated and emotionally vested; however, argument, when used in a hostile mode is more intense and passionate. Whites normally speak in a dispassionate, low-key style using argument only when angry. Argument is not used by Whites to persuade. Kochman (1981) further adds that Blacks are often judged by Whites to be negative, confronting and intransigent when in fact they are merely presenting their position in order to clarify misunderstandings.

Gay (1981), agreeing with Kochman, identifies communication as the single most important requirement for effective teaching, since it is an area that is most susceptible to misinterpretations. Baber (1987) explains that communication is an expression of culture. Its values, rhythms and styles cannot be isolated nor taken out of cultural context. The ability to communicate well, according to African American criteria, is knowing what to say, when to say it, to whom and how, and, therefore, a sign of personal power and influence (Barber, 1987). If students' personal power is established through skillful use of words they will verbally challenge authority when necessary. Gloria Baldwin (1992), an African American administrator in an urban high school, puts it succinctly when explaining "win-win" disciplinary procedures effective with African American students: "Don't try to argue down a Black child. You will lose. Suspending them for your mistake is unfair."

Another communication behavior that may create disciplinary problems with African American students is the "call-response" communicative process which involves active and spontaneous verbal and non-verbal interchange between speaker and listener (Baber, 1987). This can be misinterpreted as wrong-doing or causing trouble, if the child's intention

is not valued. Gay (1981) writes that frequently this cultural pattern of speaker-listener "talk-back" is often assumed by teachers to be rude and disrespectful, rather than engaging and stimulating. Kockman (1981) avers that classroom conflict occurs when Black students, following cultural communication style, speak out of turn instead of following the White classroom rule of raising the hand and waiting for teacher acknowledgement. Gay (1981) includes non-verbal behavior, such as the need for thinking time before responding to questions, as causing a cultural conflict if the teacher assumes that the child is being inattentive or lazy. Another example Gay (1981) offers is the child's refusal to give "eye-contact." This behavior may also be interpreted as non-attending or rude behavior. She adds that some communication behaviors manifested in the classroom may be culturally determined rather than inappropriate behavior meriting discipline.

Educators, according to Heath (1986), must also be aware of the cultural messages embedded in the language of various ethnic groups. Heath (1986) holds that every social group is not only ethnocentric but "linguacentric" and has its own way of behaving and communicating. She states that making judgments toward one group based on what is considered appropriate by another group is damaging to the achievement of children, thus generating potential conflict situations.

When communication styles include the use of a world language other than English, research from the field of bilingual education confirms that the exclusive use of one language in the classroom establishes and determines a climate of dominance and subordination (Moreau, 1984). When language-different students can not use their native language in the classroom their central force in the struggle for voice is denied (Giroux, 1986; Valdez, 1981; Ruiz, 1991). Whereas language and voice are related, it is important to

distinguish between them. Language is abstract, has a life of it own even when suppressed. Voice is concrete, if suppressed is is not heard and ceases to exist (Valdez, 1981; Ruiz, 1991).

Valdez (1981) found that student voice was destroyed in bilingual classes designed for Spanish speaking students in the Southwest. Negative attitudes toward the child's home language included not only telling students they did not speak the language they thought they spoke, but rewarding them for not speaking it at all. Cummings (1986) argues that schools' reinforcement of subordinate status through language discrimination is a major contributor causing academic failure.

Research in this area clearly supports that teacher knowledge and acceptance of varying communication styles can ameliorate disciplinary conflicts by affirming, promoting and encouraging students' cultural and linguistic differences.

Differing Core Values

Core values refer to beliefs and attitudes on desirable and undesirable goals and behaviors. In pluralistic school setting, core values should be selected from a variety of cultural alternatives, not from a mono-cultural perspective. Hall's (1977) explanation of culture, categorizes core values in four areas: personal space, time, interpersonal relations and ways of knowing. He separates culture into "low-context" and "high-context". Bennett (1990) states that the majority of American schools are based on a low-context macroculture, meaning that schools operate on tight schedules, promote competition, individual excellence and stress personal responsibility. She adds that children of color generally operate in a high-context culture which emphasizes interpersonal relations, cooperation and group membership.

Bennett (1990) proposes that Hall's theory can be used to interpret student/teacher conflicts which are often rooted in cultural differences when children experience a mis-match of values in school settings. She infers that the severity or degree of difference between the child's ethnic home culture and the school culture determines the scope and intensity of alienation.

Another core value which causes disciplinary problems in school is "time." If students are perceived by the teacher as "wasting-time" on interpersonal relationships, or if they are late to class, disciplinary action might be taken. Gilbert and Gay (1985) focus on the Black child's cultural preference of preparing themselves for work by establishing appropriate mood and setting or by seeking assistance from peers. This behavior may be interpreted by the teacher as frivolous socializing, copying or cheating. Student behavior interpreted from a high-context mode of ideal conduct causes conflict when one behavior is consistently judged more desirable. This can be a source of conflict in classrooms which does not create a climate that values and maximizes all cultural orientations. This cultural discontinuity has been identified as a major source of conflict in classrooms (Holliday, 1985).

Sizemore's (1981) study reveals that Black students perceive warm, caring teachers as competent, whereas White students value the teacher's ability to control the class. This study appears to match certain teacher characteristics to the student's personal cultural needs. Cooper (1987) concurs, adding that children of color are generally holistic individuals who value interpersonal interactions.

Cross culture research delineates the human cost involved if schools are exclusively enveloped by values and standards of the mainstream culture. Students of color with conflicting core values constantly face negative evaluations from the majority culture. By adolescence, minority students, well

aware of the values of the majority culture in terms of performance, achievement and behavior, may choose to resist the injustice and institutionalized disparity in a high-context, monocultural climate, thus creating conflict (Spencer & Dornbush, 1990; Boykin, 1986; Gay, 1981).

Class/Social Stratification

Ogbu (1979) suggests that Black children historically have been placed in a racial stratification, castelike society. This castelike racial inequality has caused differential treatment of Black students as a subordinate group in a racially stratified society. Of particular interest is what Ogbu (1979) calls the fight for collective identity as a fight for equality of status.

If interpreted correctly, this struggle for "collective identity" is evident in daily classroom interactions. African American students perceive it to be their responsibility to defend their African American peers, often risking their own well-being, if they perceive unjust treatment is occurring. This concept of "collective identity," oneness, caretaking and group importance is culturally based. It involves social action and cultural integrity which is entrenched and unified by the implicit struggle (Gay, 1981; Holiday, 1985; Bennett, 1990; Boykin, 1986; Kochman, 1981).

If the above cited factors delineated in the content literature review argue that discipline problems may be a result of cultural differences, then schools must assume partial ownership. This literature highlights the dilemma minority youth face when they encounter racism, discrimination and inequality in schools. Its major contribution has been pointing out the unjust inconsistencies of a monocultural approach to educational disciplinary and academic concerns. Perhaps, it can be influential in changing the direction

by blurring discipline boundaries and giving possibility to the challenge of reform, thus meeting the requirements of diverse students

Process: Literature Describing the Emergent Social Action Voice

Research and scholarship from proponents in the field of multicultural education have reconceptionalized the positions of students of color and poverty in the school environment. This philosophical, theoretical and pedagogical shift is committed to the urgency for social action and student empowerment when exploring the identification and perceptions of conflict issues. It hypothesizes that the solution to student/teacher conflicts in the classroom lies in operationalizing educational programs that are multicultural. Banks (1993) theorizes if true multicultural programs existed in schools, then discipline would not be an issue. Gay (1992a, 1993) adds that teaching for freedom, rather than repression, is an education that models a multicultural curriculum. Multicultural education advocates the reformulation of the existing paradigm to insure: equal status treatment to reduce prejudice, culturally compatible learning climate promoting equity of outcome, and student empowerment leading to social action. The following discussion includes documentation from multiculturalists related to discipline.

Equal Status Treatment to Reduce Prejudice

Multicultural education models dignity, individual freedom and equality of opportunity. By taking a new look at the canon of knowledge, events are not presented from the perspective of "victims and victimizers." Topics are not omitted because they illustrate unequal power relationships. Issues such as institutional racism, linguistic and gender discrimination are legitimate areas

of study (Díaz, 1992; Banks, 1994; Gay 1990, 1993). This transformation of the existing paradigm insures an equal status treatment that minimizes a power versus a powerless relationship. Nieto (1992) states that racism and other forms of discrimination are interconnected with policies and practices of schools including curricular issues such as testing, tracking, irrelevant curriculum and disciplinary issues such as suspension and expulsion. She adds schools as an institution tend to reflect the larger society which historically has had the perception that one ethnic group, class, gender or language is superior to all others. Nieto (1992) affirms that regardless of how subtle or unintentional the expressions of racism may be, the effects are always negative, causing feelings of frustration, rejection and ultimately rage as students seek approval, affection and encouragement. If schools have traditionally not empowered African American and Latino students with the knowledge and skills necessary to function effectively, it forces these alienated students to exercise their power in unacceptable confrontational disciplinary behaviors (Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Katz, 1975).

Walsh (1991) states that powerless and excluded ethnic groups such as African Americans and Latinos must be participatory, inclusive members in the shaping of educational policy and procedures. He concludes that it is this sharing of power that can lead to solutions. Banks (1994) calls this a "Shared Power Model." This model would build pride and cohesion, minimize prejudice and teach students to exercise power effectively as opposed to reacting to oppression which is often misinterpreted. Therefore, implementing a school environment that is multicultural centers the child, shares the power and leads to self-control and elimination of victimization generated by acts of discrimination and racism. An equitable educational setting reduces feelings of alienation and dislocation, thus minimizing frustration and conflict.

Culturally Compatible Learning Climate Promoting Equity of Outcome

Programs which value and nurture ethnic and linguistic differences by creating a differentiated classroom climate which is culturally compatible, focuses on equity of outcome. A monocultural Eurocentric curricular model common in most American schools, marginalizes students of color by immersing them in an alien culture that is characterized by values and behaviors which are in opposition to their own (Gay and Baber, 1987; Ortiz, 1988; White and Parham, 1990). When ethnic children and their heritages are viewed negatively and assumed to be substandard by schools, students not only fail to achieve, but learn hostile, angry self-defeating behaviors (Shade, 1982; Gay, 1993; Rist, 1970)

Nieto (1992) asserts that we can no longer blame the "victim" when it is structural policies and practices which keep students at an academic disadvantage and at risk for disciplinary action. Research indicates that low academic performance not only frustrates students but precipitates hostile behavior resulting in disciplinary problems (Oakes, 1986, Williams, 1992). Forced assimilation and concentration of children of color in remedial compensatory programs has proven to be futile in terms of academic achievement and it has caused, in some cases, a rejection of self and a resistance to the authority and power reflected in schools (Nieto, 1992; Oakes, 1985; Ortiz, 1988).

Student Empowerment Leading to Social Action

Therefore, if a multicultural climate for student learning is authenticated, discipline problems will be minimized, perhaps possibly eliminated, because a multicultural model assumes that students have choices

and can determine their own behavior. By conceptionalizing discipline as an agent for personal change and improvement, students can develop strategies to ameliorate confronting situations. The ultimate purpose of this curriculum which is multicultural, is to empower students to make reflexive, powerful, meaningful decisions toward social action (Banks, 1993; Gay, 1992; Sleeter and Grant, 1992). Cortéz (1990) believes that schools play a critical role in helping students learn strategies to interpret values and behaviors of self and others. He maintains that schools should help students become comfortable in situations with varying cultural cues in order to behave appropriately.

Empowerment is an essential component of multicultural education. It is this principal that allows students to believe in their ability to act in control (Gay, 1992b; Sleeter, 1991). Empowerment assumes students have acquired a powerful knowledge base where by they can no longer be controlled while simultaneously not being out of control (Gay, 1993). In addition, multicultural education via the dimension of student empowerment views individuals not as victims of societal problems but as action solvers of their own problems (Gay, 1993; Sleeter, 1991; Banks, 1994). Empowerment is not based on what Sleeter (1991) calls a "benevolent helping model", which she believes ultimately disables oppressed groups. Rather, it is based on the student's ability to perceive their own power as a tool to control their life. Thus an education that is multicultural creates student-agents for social change who can contribute to future intergroup understanding and social equity.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

The purpose of this research is to analyze administrative and teacher response to student misbehavior. Actions taken, such as referrals, suspensions and expulsions are analyzed from a student perspective in terms of

description, causality and rationale. Therefore, embedded within this study is STUDENT VOICE as a transformative screen legitimizing the perceptions of students from groups of color.

The following are the research questions:

1. What factors influence student/teacher behavioral confrontations?
2. Are the behavioral confrontations dysfunctional behavior on the part of the student?
3. Are the behavioral confrontations a result of a cultural/value conflict, or is it rooted more in conflicts of culture and values?

Setting

The study took place in an urban high school. The ethnic composition of the teaching staff was predominantly White (83%), and the student population was 79% minority: 14% African American, 21% Caucasian, 6% Latino and 59% Asian (Chinese being the largest group, 26%; Filipino 14%, and including Japanese, Korean, Samoan, Southeast Asian and Pacific Islander).

Design and Data Collection Method

Data for this study were collected from three major sources: student/staff questionnaires, anecdotal observations, and school district disciplinary reports.

An open-ended 13 item questionnaire was administered to 105 randomly selected students (68 responded). . The students did not accurately respond to questions of ethnicity, grade level or gender, therefore this data is not recorded. However, the original student sample included: 30 freshmen, 17 sophomores, 30 juniors, 28 seniors; 16 African American, 47 Asian, 6 Latino and 36 White; and 52 female and 53 male. Subject selection occurred in

November, 1992. The questionnaires were distributed to students by the counseling staff. The questionnaire was completed by the students using their own time and returned to the counseling office within a two week limit.

Items 1-4 of the student questionnaire solicited student descriptions on actual classroom conflicts. Items 5-13 addressed student's opinion of why confrontations occur, and how they can be avoided or ameliorated. Information from the student questionnaire generated percentages of coded data. The findings were interpreted and analysized for patterns of information. Four categories were identified. Three categories classified data into three types of conflict: procedural, substantive and interpersonal as identified by Gay (1981), which are usually encountered in pluralistic classrooms and/or other situations where different cultural/social norms and values co-exist. A fourth category "other" was included for the "blank" and "I don't know" responses. Table 1, Conflict Categories in Pluralistic Classrooms summarizes the attributes of each of these categories.

Table 1: Conflict Categories in Pluralistic Classrooms

PROCEDURAL	SUBSTANTIVE	INTERPERSONAL	OTHER
Involve conflict over courses of action, such as "how" stated rules are reached, classroom management...	Involve conflict over incompatible goals, such as, "what", grades, make-up late assignments or tests	Involve conflict when different sets of values, attitudes and beliefs are held by different groups, such as, communication styles, respect, love, perceived injustice	Used for responses left blank or "I don't know" responses

Student responses which included information in more than one category were treated as separate responses. Consequently, although 68

students responded, the number of responses on specific items ranged from 25 responses to 120 responses. For example question five generated 84 different responses from the 68 subjects.

The same questionnaire was administered to 30 selected staff, (teachers, administrators, counselors, and teacher aids) however, only five responded. Since the staff data were limited, it is not reported here.

Anecdotal observations provided additional information of conflict incidents occurring in the classroom and public areas such as the library, counseling area and school hallways. The 27 anecdotal observations involved eight African American females, seven African American males, two Latinas, four Latinos, three Filipinos, two Filipinas, and one Japanese female.

Fourteen of these incidents took place in public environments (school hallways and counseling area). All but one of the 14 incidents involved students and an administrator. One of the incidents involved a student and security personnel. All of the 14 incidents appeared to be of a minor nature but quickly escalated to a verbal battle exacerbated by the student's lack of privacy and inability to "back-down" while being reprimanded by the authority figure. All resulted in one to three days suspensions.

The remaining 13 observations involved teachers and were either in classrooms (7), library (1) or in the hallway (5) on the third floor of the school building. The following delineates the content of the student/teacher conflict: seven involved students being late to class, one a grade dispute, one was a result of student misbehavior on a fieldtrip, three were student's refusal to obey teacher directives immediately and one involved a situation where two students were defending the rights of a third student.

The Student Disciplinary Action Transaction Edit Report (1-15-93) and Disciplinary Action notebooks (personal records) of building assistant

administrators were examined to document actual discipline referrals. The Seattle Public Schools: Year End Report Student Disciplinary Appeals (1992) and the Seattle Public Schools: Data Profile District Summary were examined in order to document the percentages of disciplinary actions and appeals directed to students of color.

The sample size was adequate and randomly selected thus suggesting possible generalizability to a comparable population. The questions were open-ended allowing the subjects authenticity and elaboration. This format presented an overview of student generated identification-description-perception of classroom behavioral confrontations.

LIMITATIONS

Due to the anonymity of the questionnaire responses, it was not possible to address important variables such as ethnicity, gender, achievement history, grade level, English language proficiency, socio-economic status or confirm actual individual disciplinary referrals, suspension and expulsions. The questionnaires were not coded and therefore could not be traced to specific students as identified in the computer generated random sample. There were no additional probes or interviews with the individuals in the sample which might have improved the validity and interpretations of the students' perceptions and opinions. The retrospective nature of self-report data may be subject to errors in recall and inaccurate over-reporting or under-reporting which could have influenced the study findings. The classification and coding of the data, although analysized by an established coding scheme, involved only the investigator in the interpretive process and subsequent analysis. This research is a starting point for future research. A replication study can provide opportunities for design improvement.

RESULTS

The results are classified into three major areas: personal psychological and sociological problems; violation of students rights and student descriptions and perceptions of factors resulting in conflict, the reasons why conflicts occur and how they can be avoided. Selected vignettes resulting from the anecdotal observations are presented to illustrate and further clarify the data in each of these categories.

Personal Psychological and Sociological Problems

Less than 1% percent of the students reported that personal psychological and sociological problems were at times the cause of conflict.

Violations of Student Rights

There were 281 students in Seattle Public Schools who initiated disciplinary appeals indicating that perhaps students felt their rights were violated. Students on the secondary level accounted for 55.4% of these appeals. The results of the disciplinary appeals on all levels (elementary, middle and high school) were as follows: 38.1% were upheld, 34.2% were modified, 18.9% were mediated and 8.4% were reversed. These data indicated that 61.5% of suspensions and/or expulsions were either modified, mediated or reversed when an objective hearing board was presented with individual cases. Disciplinary appeals hearings for the 1991-1992 school year have significantly increased as compared to the 1990-1991 school year. Appeal hearings increased by 59% on the secondary level within one year.

In the questionnaire students were asked if they were treated fairly.

Almost half, 47.47% of the time, students felt they were treated unfairly. The following observation illustrates why students may perceive unfair treatment.

> Observation # 1
>
> Assignment is given to students. They are talking as they obtain and share necessary materials, such as paper, pencils and books for assignment. A Black student is told (disciplined) to be quiet and get to work. She is perceived by the teacher as wasting time. Two other Black female students inform the teacher that the disciplined student is working and isn't talking and why doesn't she tell other kids that are talking to be quiet too. The teacher tells the students, "Please do your work. This is not your affair." The precipitator eases out of the situation and works quietly. The defenders continue the "discussion" which escalates to "argument" when the teacher refuses to listen to the students' explanation. This results in a teacher referral and removal of the two "defenders" from the classroom.

The above observation illustrates the adult's inability to hear the student's explanation and the student's inability to "back-down" once involved in a verbal confrontation, especially when it takes place in front of peers. The "negative" student behavior appears to be stimulated instinctively and unconsciously. The situation is emotionally charged, personally vested and self-protective. While insisting on having the last word, the students seem conditioned to accept the final result, suspension. Nonetheless, the students appear to have no other choice but to defend their interests.

Student Descriptions and Perceptions of Factors Resulting in Conflict

The first four questions, related to conflict issues in the classroom, asked students to describe "what happened", to explain "was it fair," and to indicate "why they remembered the incident." Data generated from these questions are as follows: Of the total number of possible incidents (68 x 4 =272) a total of 99 incidents were reported (36.39%), 173 or 63.60% reported no incidents.

A total of 191 different responses were given for questions one through four. Some students wrote more than one response and others wrote responses that fell in two or more categories. Table 2, summarizes the data for questions one through four.

Table 2: Conflict Categories in Pluralistsic Classrooms Summary of Data for Questions 1-4

Question	Procedural	Substantive	Interpersonal	Other
# 1	1	1	9	0
# 2	6	4	9	2
# 3	2	8	11	3
# 4	8	10	18	7
Total	17.17%	23.23%	47.47%	12.12%

The key findings in items 1-4 emerging from the study were:

- 83.83% of the incidents escalated from minor to major confrontations
- 75.75% of the incidents involved conflict between students and teachers
- 35.35% of the incidents were teacher initiated
- 47.47% of the incidents were conflict classified as interpersonal
- 47.47% of the students felt they were treated unfairly
- 10 involved fighting, three of the ten involved student hitting teacher

STUDENT VOICE
Descriptions and Perceptions of Factors Resulting in Conflict

TABLE 1: Data from Questions 1-4
Conflict Categories in Pluralistic Classrooms

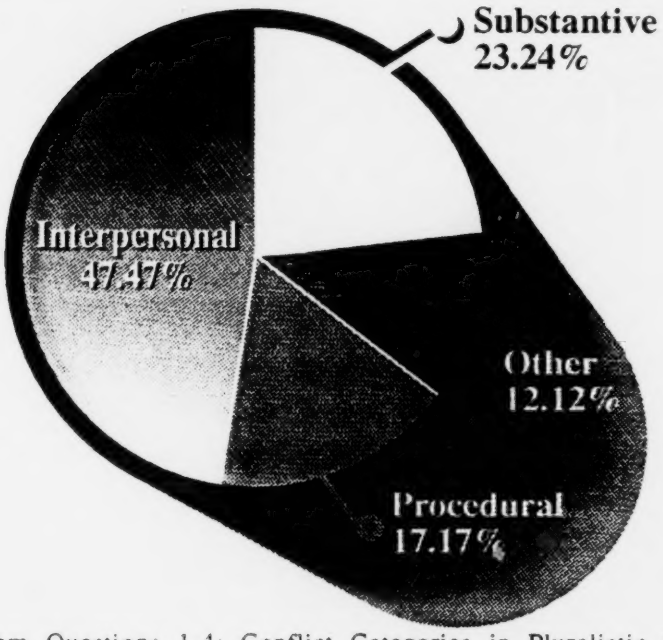

Chart 1: Data from Questions 1-4: Conflict Categories in Pluralistic Classrooms
Student descriptions and perceptions of factors resulting in conflict

Questions 5-13 solicited students' opinions on why confrontations occur and how to ameliorate the situation. Students identify poor classroom management. boring instructional content and rude. negative behavior on the part of the student as major factors causing confrontations. A total of 94% of the students have either been given a referral or have personally witnessed a friend or acquaintance receiving one.

STUDENT VOICE
Reasons Why Conflicts Occur and How They Can Be Avoided

TABLE 11: Data From Questions 5-13
Conflict Categories in Pluralistic Classrooms

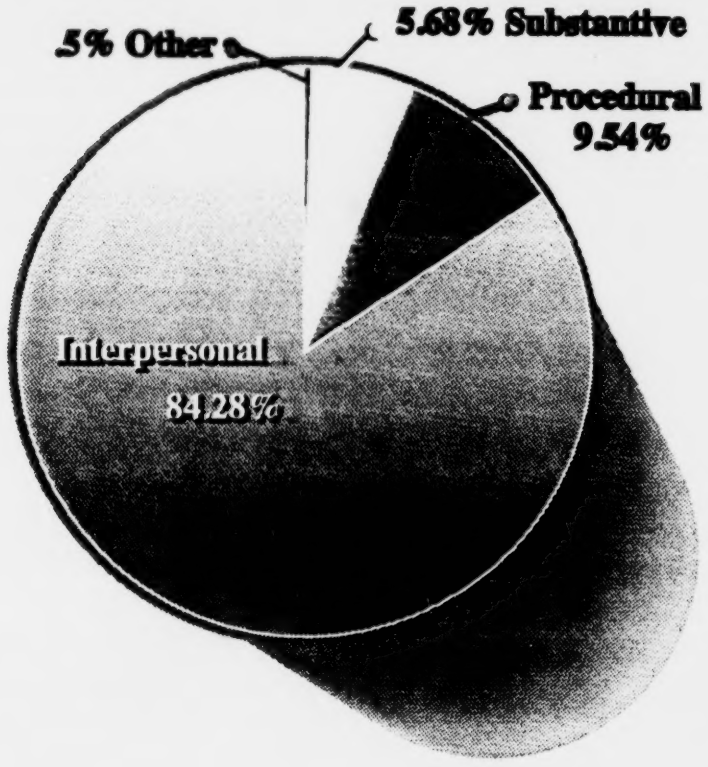

Table II: Data from Questions 5-13: Conflict Categories in Pluralistic Classroom. Student descriptions and perceptions of why conflicts occur and how then can be avoided.

The significant finding from the information generated by these questions is that 84.28% of the students feel that interpersonal relationships are the most significant precipitators of conflict in pluralistic classrooms. Relationship factors identified include the lack of nurturing, the need to like and be liked by the teacher, mutual respect, poor communication, perceived injustices, and different perspectives. Other factors identified as causing

conflict include: 9.54%, a result of procedural issues: incidents such as student refusal to return to assigned seat, students talking without first raising hand and being recognized by the teacher, tardiness and teacher yelling at student instead of listening to student's explanation; and 5.22%, conflicts substantive in nature, including grade disputes, make-up of late assignments and teachers touching students while disciplining them. "I don't know" and blank responses accounted for .5% of the responses.

Students perceptions on how to avoid or correct these conflicts are patterned around three areas: developing positive interpersonal relations, improving communication skills and increasing teacher competence in classroom management skills. Discussion follows:

Interpersonal Relationships

Interpersonal relationships emerged and established themselves as a dominate influence in student/teacher conflicts. Almost half, 48.5%, and if you add the "maybe/sometimes" responses 71.9% of the students, felt disputes could be avoided or resolved by having more caring teachers. Teacher competence/classroom management was considered a minor factor in comparison to positive interpersonal relationships.

The need for teachers and students to care, love, like, respect and value each other is a powerful finding that is repeatedly stated by students. Students feel that the majority of teachers don't care, and students seem to internalize and react negatively to this perceived teacher rejection. Many students state that teachers dislike students, put them down and hurt their feelings. However, students express that it is difficult to be disrespectful to a teacher they like even when they judge that teacher to be wrong.

Developing stronger interpersonal skills between student and teacher is suggested as a possible solution by 65% of the students. When the question required students to conjure a positive teacher image, 41% confirm that a "good teacher" would have highly developed interpersonal skills.

The following are student comments to support this observation:

" If teachers and students don't like each other, the teacher might mess with the student or the student might start messing with the teacher."

"There are confrontations with teachers because the majority of teachers don't care, students see this and react."

"'cause some teachers are almost friends. Sort of. It's hard to scream nasty words to someone you've talked as a friend or someone on your side. I think it depends on the relationship between the teacher and the student."

Communication

The issue of communication can be combined with the interpersonal category since it is a manifestation of an operational interpersonal relationship. A major finding is that a majority of the students report that they are not allowed to state their side of the story; consequently, they feel that problems are exacerbated due to different student/teacher perspectives, misunderstandings, teachers thinking students are angry when they are emotionally vested in stating their case, teachers not willing to listen and teachers thinking they are always right.

Some sample student expressions of these values are:
"They never find out what's wrong they just go straight for what they think is right which is not always."

"Look at it from the other persons point of view. And make sure you know what the problems are before you make accusations."

"Maybe if both had an idea of what the other wanted."

Teacher Competence and Classroom Management

A total of 93% of the respondents said some teachers have more problems than other teachers. Students reported teachers as initiating confrontation due to short tempers, yelling at students, inability to explain classroom expectations, and incapability to handle disruptive students, therefore making the situation worse instead of better. Some students even state that incompetent teachers are often afraid of unruly students.

The following are typical comments:

"Teachers do not know how to control the class."

"Some have very big tempers and yell at the slightest thing. Some don't know what to do in a situation where the student gets out of hand."

"Teachers who don't know what they are doing seem to get taken advantage of."

INTERPRETATION AND IMPLICATIONS

The simplicity, honesty, and realism inherent in the students' perceptions are not only powerful, but clearly indicative of the cultural discontinuity operating within the school climate among diverse students and teachers. The fact that students perceive educators as uninformed, uncaring and insensitive may be a contributing factor to discipline being identified by researchers as the number one problem affecting schools.

This study refutes Phelan's (1987) theory that personal and sociological problems are the dominant factors causing identified dysfunctional behavior.

Less than 1% percent of the students reported that personal psychological and sociological problems as the cause of student confrontations.

This research concurs with Williams's (1992) finding that often there appears to be a lack of consistency in determining and matching the severity of the punishment to the actual infraction. Perhaps this accounts for the increase in the number of appeals and the high percentage (61.5%) of modifications, mediations and reversals of administrative initiated suspensions and expulsions. Due process implies that a student facing disciplinary action will be afforded an initial hearing where they are not presumed to be guilty. All evidence is evaluated objectively. The findings which emerged from this study indicate that student's rights were routinely violated. Students were not given the opportunity to defend, explain or deny the allegations. They were at times confronted in public areas where peers could observe the reprimands. Some students were not given oral nor written notice of the charges. Parents were not informed prior to sending student home. Students were penalized because of a prior "reputation" as a disruptive students. Punishment was, at times, unduly harsh. Rudeness and disrespect toward an adult usually resulted in one day suspension. There appeared to be no accountability for the behavior of the teachers and administrators. Writing and submitting a referral to an administrator for disciplinary action is the typical mode of discipline for classroom teachers when they identify the student as being out of control. As in administrative initiated discipline, this type of teacher initiated discipline has no clearly defined standards as to when students should be referred. The decision to refer a student is left totally to the discretion of the individual who witnesses the infraction, usually the teacher. Absence of standards governing referrals results in different treatments for students at

best, based on teachers' level of comfort with inappropriate behavior, and at worse, on their values, prejudices and limited awareness of cultural mores.

Students identify poor classroom management, boring instructional content, as well as rude, negative behavior on the part of the student as factors causing confrontations. The data supports Garza-Lubeck (1992) that out-of-control students are not far removed from out-of-control teachers and even out-of-control schools. A total of 94% of the students (64/68) had either been given a referral or had personally witnessed a friend receiving one.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION OR FURTHER RESEARCH

Schools should be aware that regardless of whether students are behaving inappropriately or whether they are being intentionally or unintentionally discriminated against by school staff, the fact that African-Americans and Latino students experience more disciplinary actions demands that strategies which address this problem be developed.

Regardless of the school staff orientation toward discipline, students do not lose their constitutional rights when they enter the school building. Clear definitions regarding behaviors that merit suspensions, expulsions and teacher referrals must be available to parents, students, administrators and teachers.

Additional research must be conducted to determine student behavior as inappropriate, or as a cultural, value conflict caused by lack of knowledge or experience on the part of the school. Questions such as the following must be systematically addressed and alternate lines of inquiry beyond those which have been explored must be established, especially when there are areas of dispute in conclusions:

- To what degree and how often does low academic achievement, culturally insensitive programs in terms of content, context and process aggravate and stimulate conflict between the student and the school?
- Does instinctive-unconscious cultural behavioral orientations, differing communication modes, degree of ethnic identity and the ability to successfully bridge across incompatible cultures initiate and/or exacerbate student/teacher confrontations?
- How knowledgeable is the teacher in understanding students' perceptions regarding justification of disciplinary action taken?
- How do interpersonal relationships impact confrontations?
- What would be the effect of establishing student/teacher conference time within the school day?

These substantive issues must be addressed. The resulting action of disciplinary action can be detrimental to the student's academic opportunities, to the point of dropping out of school.

CONCLUSION

Student voice, indicating the need for positive student/teacher interpersonal relationships, is often not taken into consideration by educators. Schools are not aware that the behavioral confrontation might be a result of situations where teachers and students represent different ethnic groups with different goals, cultural codes, value systems and background experiences. Educators need to be aware and sensitive to the ways in which cultural conditioning differs from school socialization patterns. It is essential to understand the results of student behavior rooted and generated by cultural

foundations, especially when this behavior clashes with institutionalized norms and expectations.

Issues surrounding cultural diversity and classroom behavioral problems must be addressed along with academic content. Perhaps conflict can not be eliminated, but it can be minimized. Effort must be made to understand the factors that influence student/teacher confrontations so that educators can create culturally pluralistic environments to foster student capability for academic, personal and social success and insure equality of treatment in disciplinary interactions. This includes eliminating those obstacles which prevent the teacher and/or student from understanding, appreciating and respecting each others cultural positions. It also involves reframing policy and procedures regarding disciplinary action taken toward students of color. The relationships of teachers and students with the complex interaction of variables such as ethnicity, class and gender must be explored.

Since the purpose of this research was to legitimize and identify student perceptions in regards to disciplinary issues, hopefully, the results will assist educators in ameliorating confrontations, sensitize classroom climate and decrease the suspension/expulsion rate. The ultimate goal and solution will result in an environment which will foster a social, personal and academic context which is in the best interest of all students.

Information from this study may be a starting point for educators, students and parents toward understanding the attributes of potential conflict among different ethnic group norms and cultural life styles. Thus, directing appropriate intervention which addresses everyone's self worth, therefore, decreasing the systematic, often unjustified, removal from the classroom and/or the summarily dismissal from the school.

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STUDENT VOICE
Reasons Why Conflicts Occur and How They Can Be Avoided

TABLE 11: Data From Questions 5-13
Conflict Categories in Pluralistic Classrooms

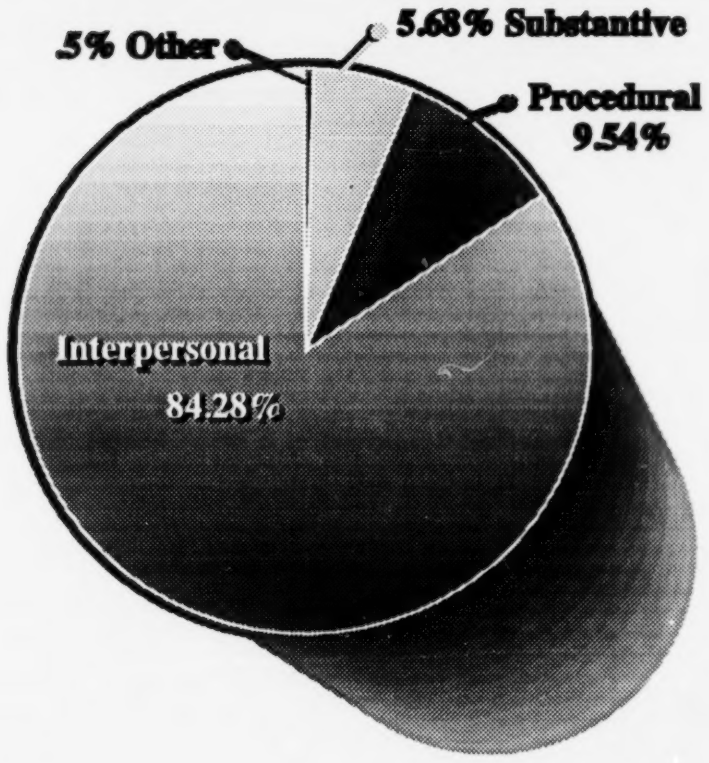

Table II: Data from Questions 5-13: Conflict Categories in Pluralistic Classroom. Student descriptions and perceptions of why conflicts occur and how then can be avoided.

The significant finding from the information generated by these questions is that 84.28% of the students feel that interpersonal relationships are the most significant precipitators of conflict in pluralistic classrooms. Relationship factors identified include the lack of nurturing, the need to like and be liked by the teacher, mutual respect, poor communication, perceived injustices, and different perspectives. Other factors identified as causing

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STUDENT VOICE
Descriptions and Perceptions of Factors Resulting in Conflict

TABLE 1: Data from Questions 1-4
Conflict Categories in Pluralistic Classrooms

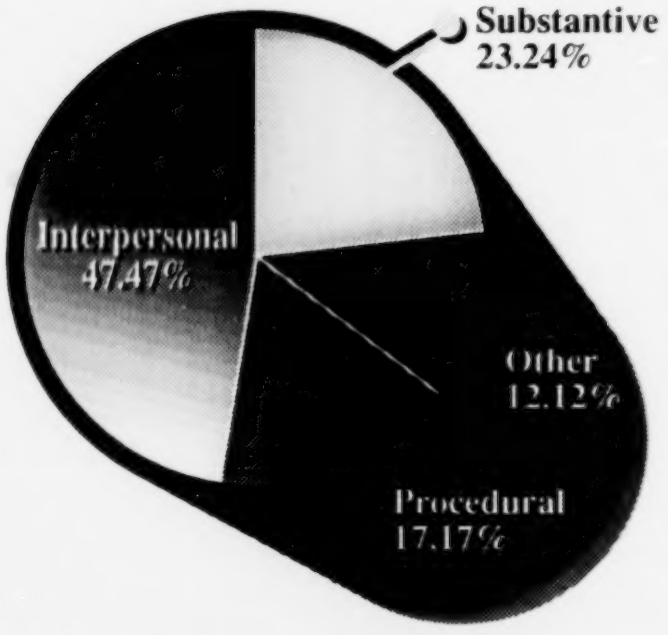

Figure 2: Data from Questions 1-4: Conflict Categories in Pluralistic Classrooms - Student descriptions and perceptions of factors resulting in conflict

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Figure I: Conceptual Framework